

Aspects of Grammar

a handbook for writing assessment

Contents

Overview.....	page 3
What is a text?	page 4
Grammar.....	page 5
A literary text: narrative.....	page 6
A factual text: explanation.....	page 7
Activity one: considering student responses.....	page 8
What are the elements of a sentence?	
Subject, verb, object.....	page 10
How do writers enhance meaning in a sentence?	
Nouns, noun groups and pronouns.....	page 12
Activity two: nouns and noun groups.....	page 15
Activity three: pronoun errors.....	page 15
Solutions to Activity two and Activity three.....	page 16
Verbs, verb groups, tense, adverbs and adverbial phrases.....	page 17
Activity four: verb groups, finite and non-finite verbs.....	page 23
Activity five: verb errors.....	page 23
Solutions to Activity four and Activity five.....	page 24
Clauses and phrases.....	page 25
Activity six: clauses.....	page 27
Activity seven: adverbial and adjectival phrases.....	page 27
Solutions to Activity six and Activity seven.....	page 28
How are sentences structured?	
Simple, compound and complex sentences.....	page 29
Activity eight: correct and incorrect sentences.....	page 33
Activity nine: sentence types.....	page 33
Solutions to Activity eight and Activity nine.....	page 34
How are whole texts structured?	
Whole text organisation.....	page 35
Paragraphs.....	page 35
Activity ten: paragraphs.....	page 36
Solution to Activity ten.....	page 36
Activity eleven: mixed errors.....	page 37
Solutions to Activity eleven.....	page 37
Other relevant concepts	
Stylistic devices.....	page 38
Voice.....	page 39
Modality.....	page 41
Rhetorical devices.....	page 43
Nominalisation.....	page 44

Overview

This booklet is designed to prepare markers of criterion-referenced writing assessment tasks such as the NSW Department of Education and Training's Year 7 English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) and the Year 3 and Year 5 Basic Skills Test (BST) Writing. These assessments require markers to have a sound knowledge of language processes and grammatical functions.

The purpose of criterion-referenced assessment of writing is to enable detailed and specific reporting of student achievement. Rather than reporting that a student has attained a particular rank or grade, assessing against criteria means that it is possible to describe specific aspects of student writing. The actual levels of achievement of writing outcomes can be detailed in relation to individual students and individual schools. Thus teachers and schools are equipped with evidence that can inform teaching and learning programs to better meet the literacy needs of students.

Both ELLA and BST Writing contain two writing tasks: one a factual text and the other a literary text. The criteria are constructed to reflect the particular demands of each individual task. By assessing both factual and literary writing, it is possible to report to teachers on a broad range of writing skills.

ELLA and BST Writing assess writing against criteria that are grouped into four areas of analysis:

- whole text processes
- whole text features
- sentence level features
- word level features.

The whole text processes and whole text features of language assessed in ELLA and BST Writing vary depending on the type of text and the purposes of a particular writing task. Sentence level and word level features assess more general writing skills such as articles, plurals, punctuation and spelling.

What is a text?

A text is any meaningful piece of visual, spoken or written language. The particular structures and language features of a text are dependent on the context in which it is produced and the audience and purpose for which it is intended.

The purpose of a text may be to describe, explain, persuade, amuse or inform. Initially, many of the texts that students compose may achieve only a single purpose, such as **recounting** an event or **describing** a place in an imaginative way. As students progress, writing tasks may require them to write for several purposes such as **describing** a place and **persuading** readers to visit it, or **chronicling** the history of a civilisation and **explaining** why it failed.

Each different purpose for writing will generate texts with recognisable structures and language features. These typical texts are referred to as 'text types'. Text types can be described according to the sequence and nature of the stages through which they develop, and the grammar appropriate to each type. However, many texts have more than one purpose so they combine text types.

In the *K–6 English Syllabus* (Board of Studies, NSW), texts are categorised and defined in particular ways. Texts fall into two broad categories: literary texts and factual texts, both of which include media texts.

Literary texts (such as narrative, drama and poetry) can be presented in a range of forms such as:

- Aboriginal Dreaming stories
- drama scripts
- fantasy
- poems
- historical narratives
- science fiction
- legends
- response
- lyrics
- myths

Factual texts (such as discussions, explanations, expositions, information reports, procedures and recounts) can be presented in a range of forms such as:

- advertisements
- newspaper articles
- debates
- recipes
- directions
- reports
- essays
- letters
- instructions
- reviews
- interviews

Grammar

Grammar was once regarded as a set of rules that prescribed the so-called correct ways of structuring and using language. What was taught as grammar was often related to understanding and learning patterns of other languages such as Latin. This traditional view of grammar was seen by many linguists as limiting, as it could not always be applied to the dynamic and evolving nature of modern English language. As a consequence, grammar also evolved into a dynamic concept that could be applied to current language usage. As such, grammar is now seen as a way of describing regular language patterns and the way these patterns function to make meaning in particular contexts or cultures.

Grammar can be defined as systems for ordering the resources of language in a text to achieve particular meanings in particular contexts. In learning about grammar, students learn to understand how these systems work and to make grammatical choices appropriate to particular contexts or situations.

Thus grammar as it is related to the writing tasks in ELLA and BST Writing needs to be understood at two levels:

- **textual grammar** where whole text processes and features, such as structure, organisation and the requirements of a particular text type, are considered in relation to purpose, audience and theme, and
- **syntactical or sentence grammar** which considers how smaller elements such as paragraphs, sentences and word choice contribute to the meaning and effectiveness of the text.

A literary text: narrative

Purpose: The purpose of a narrative text is to tell a story as a means of making sense of events and happenings in an imaginary world. A narrative constructs a pattern of events where characters face a problem or unexpected event, which they try to resolve.

Structure: The narrative structure includes the following elements:

Orientation: The writer tells readers **who** the characters are, **what** is happening and **where** and **when** the action is happening.

Complication: The complication presents the character/s with a problem or problems to be solved. It is the main focus of the narrative and usually creates tension or suspense.

Sequence of events: The consequences of the complication are explored and developed through a series of events that lead to the climax or high point of the story.

Resolution: This comes at the end of the story when the character has resolved, or at least reacted to, the complication/s.

Coda: A comment may be added where the writer provides a comment on the events or provides a moral or lesson to be learned from the story.

Other features of a narrative text

A narrative text is based on a **theme** or main idea which encourages readers to reflect on some aspect of human behaviour such as the value of friendship, overcoming adversity, hope for the future, loyalty, courage or standing up for what you believe.

An engaging narrative contains **descriptions** which give clear information about characters, their behaviour, their thought processes, the setting and so on. Character description may include precise details about appearance, personality, preferences, habits and behaviour. Description of setting may include details about location, time, climate and geographical features.

To create effective description, writers use:

- adjectives and noun groups
- action verbs and adverbs
- figurative language devices such as similes and metaphors.

Competent writers also create atmosphere in their narratives by using effective descriptive devices such as emotive words that enable readers to actually feel the atmosphere of the places or events being described, such as the unpleasantness of a damp, smelly prison cell or the misery of being caught in a howling blizzard.

A factual text: explanation

Purpose: The purpose of an explanation text is to explain how or why things occur, or how things work.

Structure: An explanation includes the following structural features:

General statement: Some brief, general information about the focus item, process or phenomenon is given.

A series of statements: The phenomenon is explained in a logical sequence of developed statements.

Concluding statement: The final statement briefly reviews or sums up the explanation in a general way.

Other features of an explanation text

Reference to non-human participants: Often phenomena of the natural or scientific world are being explained eg *climate change, how a Bunsen burner works, how lightning is generated*.

Use of processes: The phenomenon is deconstructed into its elements for an explanation of how its various elements/stages work.

Verb tense: The **timeless present** is used to indicate the continuous nature of what is going on. Verbs are usually in the **passive voice** to explain what happens to things: eg *Ice crystals and water are torn apart*.

The stages of the explanation are linked by the use of **conjunctions and connectives** that can be **temporal** and/or **causal**. For example:

Temporal conjunctions (*when, after, before*)

Causal conjunctions (*because, as, since*)

Temporal connectives (*at first, then, next, finally*)

Causal connectives (*consequently, as a result, accordingly*).

The register is **formal** and **objective**, with the text being written in the **third person**.

Effective explanation texts include the use of **technical terms, nominalisation** (eg *evaporation*) and **complex noun groups** to describe the phenomenon (*lighter positively charged particles*).

Activity one: considering student responses

News reports in newspapers give readers information about events that have recently happened.

Guidelines

Newspaper reports usually have:

- a headline to grab the reader's attention, eg *Baby rescued from flood*
- an opening or lead paragraph which gives a summary of the *who?*, *what?*, *when?* and *where?* of the event
- additional information about the answers to these questions
- information about the *why* and *how* of the event
- comments by people who were involved, eg *"It was a frightening experience," one bystander stated.*
- concise, factual language.

Look at the images below.



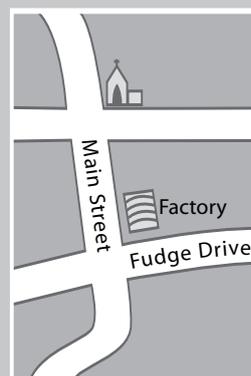
Saturday
28 February



Products



Magpie Hill
Street Map



I was driving...



The images shown above give some information about the fire that destroyed the Chocolate Factory at Magpie Hill. They show when and where the fire occurred and what the factory made. They also show some of the people who may have been asked to comment on the fire.

Write a news report about the fire that destroyed the chocolate factory at Magpie Hill.

Read the three texts and consider the following questions:

What is the purpose of the writing?

How would you rank the three texts in responding to the task?

What makes one better than another in meeting the demands of the task?

Sample A

When Genevieve got off the train, she pulled her coat collar up around her ears. The weather was miserable, bitterly cold and windy. She noticed dark greenish-black clouds swirling overhead and heard the familiar rumble of thunder.

"It's going to pour down any minute," she thought to herself as she quickened her step.

Just then, hurrying along Main Street to the factory, she saw a shaft of white lightning strike the roof of the factory where she worked. Sparks shot high into the air like fire-works. The roof immediately erupted into flames and black smoke began billowing into the sky. Fire alarms started ringing and people fled from the stricken building out onto the street.

Moments later, Genevieve watched as two fire trucks sped down the street towards her. Curious people gathered in small groups to watch the action. Fire fighters rapidly unrolled the long hoses and began to flood the upper floors. The ladders were raised too and men were soon clambering up them to attack the fire on the roof but the fire spread rapidly to the floors below.

Genevieve was numb as she thought of all the chocolates literally going up in smoke.

Sample B

It is Saturday 28 February and we're here on the corner of Fudge Drive and Main Street where The Magpie Hill Chocolate Factory is ablaze with fire. It seems that the fire broke out about 3:50am and I have just spoken to the fire chief who told me arson couldn't be ruled out.

We have with us right here some people who were first on the scene. Jenny, can you tell us what happened?

Well, I was driving past the building when I heard this huge bang and then flames started blazing out of the roof and windows. I rang the fire brigade straight away.

I also have with me fireman Dan. What can you tell us?

By the time we arrived on the scene, the fire was well alight and there wasn't much hope of saving the factory. We are just making sure that it doesn't spread to any buildings nearby. There is melted chocolate everywhere and it's making things pretty slippery for the fire fighters here this morning. But we have the situation under control. But we won't know how this fire started until the investigators take a look.

Well, that's all for now. We'll keep you posted. Dee Sarstor reporting.

Sample C

CHOCOLATE BUSINESS HEATS UP

In the early hours of Saturday morning 28 February, a fire completely destroyed the Magpie Hill Chocolate Factory on Main Street. The factory is well known in the local area providing employment to several hundred workers.

The fire brigade received an anonymous call just before 4:00am but by the time fire fighters arrived on the scene the fire had spread and the whole building was ablaze. Fire Chief Lloyd Martin stated, "We know this fire did not happen by accident. We found several petrol cans by the rear doors and it's clear that is where the fire started."

There have been several suspicious fires in the area over recent months and citizens are relied upon to be vigilant. Mrs S Beak of Redfern is one such citizen. "I was going down Fudge Drive when two men dressed in black raced across the street and jumped into a white van. When I turned into Main Street I saw smoke and flames coming from the windows. "

The chocolate factory was first opened in 1907 by William Blake and was a family business that was still owned and operated by his grandson Kyle Blake. It is likely this fire will not only have a huge impact on Easter supplies of chocolates but will send hundreds to the unemployment queues.

What are the elements of a sentence?

The basic pattern of English syntax, the clause, consists of the elements of subject (S), verb (V) and object (O). A sentence must have a subject (either stated or implied) and a verb. The object element is not always essential.

Subject, verb, object

Subject

The subject of a sentence is the person or thing that the sentence is about; the element that operates or acts on the verb. We can identify the subject by locating the verb and asking, 'Who or what makes the verb happen?'

Consider the simple sentence: *The athlete ran the race.*

Who *ran*? *The athlete* (the subject)

Another way to identify the subject is to add a tag to the end of the sentence, questioning what happened. The pronoun used will refer to the noun/noun group functioning as the subject. For example:

The athlete ran the race, didn't she?

Sometimes a **dummy subject** is used in sentences. For instance, neither of the following sentences has a semantic subject. The words *it* and *there* function as dummy subjects.

It is a long way home.

There are some things you should know about safety.

In imperative sentences (commands), the subject is usually ellipsed (understood but not stated).

(You) Get out of here!

(You) Take that away.

Sometimes the subject is included for emphasis, either at the beginning or end of the imperative sentence.

You, get out of here!

Get out of here, you!

Verb

The verb is the element that expresses what is happening in a sentence and locates it in time (tense). We can identify the verb by asking: ‘What is happening or being done?’

Suddenly the door slammed in the wind.

What happened or was done? The door *slammed* (the verb).

The verb element often consists of more than one word in order to express what is happening. It is then called a verb group.

The tickets were selling quickly.

Firefighters had continued to hose the flames all night.

The workers could have been injured very seriously.

Common verb errors

In assessing student responses in ELLA and BST Writing, certain verb errors are commonly identified:

Incorrect subject/verb agreement: *The girls sings in a choir.*

Inconsistent verb tense: *In the end he escaped and sees his friend again.*

Incorrect verb form: *I seen it on video but I could of gone to the movies.*

Object

Not all sentences have an object element, because not all verbs require an object. In general, however, the object is a noun or noun group that follows the verb without a preposition. The happening or action of the verb is carried over to the object. For example:

Clouds covered the summit.

To identify whether the noun/noun group following the verb is the object, ask ‘What is being affected by the verb?’ If the noun/noun group becomes the subject when the sentence is changed from active to passive voice, then that noun/noun group is the object. For example:

The athlete ran the race.

Active voice where the object is *the race*.

The race was run by the athlete.

Passive voice but here there is no object as *the race* is now the subject.

How do writers enhance meaning in a sentence?

In ELLA and BST Writing several criteria assess how students' choice of language can make their writing more effective. Students can add descriptive detail to enhance meaning by building noun groups and verb groups and selecting appropriate adverbials.

Nouns, noun groups and pronouns

Nouns

Nouns are words that name people, places, things and ideas.

Different types of nouns include:

- **Common nouns** that name classes of people, places and things and begin with a lower case letter, eg *film, bush, computer, biography, mother, adjective*.
- **Proper nouns** that name particular people, places and things and begin with a capital letter, eg *Sam, Sydney Harbour, Commonwealth Government*. Acronyms such as *ELLA* and *BST* usually contain all capital letters.
- **Abstract nouns** name ideas or concepts (things that cannot be seen and touched), eg *freedom, democracy, happiness, tragedy, peace, joy, hypothesis*.
- **Collective nouns** name groups of things, eg *group, class, flock, bunch, herd*. Students may have difficulty with subject–verb agreement when using collective nouns. The meaning (whether the group is being considered as a whole or as individuals) dictates correct usage.
- **Mass or uncountable nouns** name things that cannot be counted, eg *news, information, rain, traffic, jewellery*. To count mass nouns, other nouns (quantifiers) are needed. For example: *ten items of news, two pages of information, a shower of rain, a piece of jewellery*.

Noun groups

A **noun group** is a group of words that functions in a sentence as a noun does. Writers can enhance the descriptive detail in their writing by adding qualifying words or phrases before the noun (**premodification**) or after the noun (**postmodification**).

Premodification of noun groups usually consists of an article (*the, a/an*) plus one or more adjectives and sometimes adverbs modifying the adjectives. Adjectives are words that describe or add extra information to nouns. In the following example, two noun groups with premodified nouns are indicated.

Locals watched ^{article} ^{adverb} ^{adjective} ^{noun} the steeply curving waves ^{article} ^{adjective} ^{adjective} ^{noun} smash the small wooden boat.

When more than one adjective is used before a noun, the conventional order moves from the general to the specific. For example:

Tall grey-green wattle trees **not** *grey-green wattle tall trees*

Postmodification of noun groups usually consists of adjectival phrases and adjectival (relative) clauses. Often such clauses and phrases used in this way are described as **embedded**. For example:

*The shop **with its store of chocolate** was very popular.*

This noun group has an embedded adjectival phrase.

*The shop, **which was located in the centre of town**, was very popular.*

This noun group has an embedded adjectival clause.

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that stands in place of a noun, noun group or name. Pronouns generally need to have clear and consistent reference, referring to something that has been identified or named elsewhere in the text. Pronouns generally reference back to words earlier in the text, however sometimes a pronoun can be used and referenced to a word forward in the text.

Correct: *The train was late so Ming was relieved when **it** finally arrived.* [refers backwards]

Correct: *Although **it** was late, the train finally arrived.* [refers forward]

Incorrect: ***It** was late so Ming was relieved when **it** finally arrived.* [What was late?]

Pronouns help to give a text cohesion and prevent it from becoming repetitious. Pronouns are only effective if they are not ambiguous (that is, there is a clear line of reference) and if they are not used repetitively.

Some writers are inconsistent in their use of pronouns, especially when referring to animals. For example:

*Brutus was a very clever dog. When **his** owner was sick, **it** rang the ambulance.*

Different types of pronouns include:

- Personal: *I, we, you, she, he, it, they, me, us, her, him, them*
- Possessive: *mine, ours, yours, hers, his, its, theirs*
- Reflexive: *myself, ourselves, yourself, yourselves, herself, himself, themselves*
- Demonstrative: *this, that, these, those*
- Indefinite: *each, any, some, all*
- Relative: *who, whom, whose, which, that*
- Interrogative: *who, which, what, whose, whom.*

Common pronoun errors

Common pronoun problems for students include: ambiguity (the reference is unclear), incorrect number, incorrect gender and incorrect case.

<i>A frog has front and back legs to help them swim.</i>	incorrect number – only one frog
<i>The mother frog lays his eggs in the water.</i>	incorrect gender – <i>her</i>
<i>They hatch in six days. They can jump three to six metres.</i>	ambiguity – <i>They</i> are eggs and frogs
<i>Joel and me caught some tadpoles</i>	incorrect case – <i>Joel and I</i>
<i>and we put it in tins.</i>	incorrect number – <i>we put them</i>
<i>My dad that knows a lot about frogs said</i>	incorrect relative pronoun – <i>who</i>
<i>that they will hatch next week.</i>	ambiguity – eggs or frogs will hatch?

Activity two: nouns and noun groups

Underline the noun groups in the sentences below. Tick any articles and circle any adjectives in the noun groups. An example has been done for you.

eg Last [✓]night [✓]a party was held at the (twins') place to welcome their newest neighbours.

1. The first Tuesday of each term is our house meeting time.
2. Greasy, untidy grey hair fell down from under the old man's dirty baseball cap.
3. We drank ten litres of fizzy green soft drink at Jason's tenth birthday party.
4. A bunch of red roses arrived from an enthusiastic fan.
5. For the day's big adventure we packed a picnic lunch and our new swimming costumes.
6. Mum made a healthy soup using fresh, tasty vegetables.

Activity three: pronoun errors

The sentences below contain the types of errors commonly found in student writing. Correct each sentence and indicate the type of pronoun error evident.

eg *I phoned the police station and **he** said a car was on its way.*
(**unreferenced pronoun** – who is *he*?)

1. The stairs looked as if they would collapse but I walked up it anyway.
2. For a whale's diet they would eat krill, crustaceans and fish.
3. After they said goodbye to their parents they left them to go on their holiday.
4. The book is about a girl who father is an artist.
5. The boy put on he's jacket and picked up her suitcase.
6. After school, Sue brought Mark to Sue's house. Mark and Sue played Mark's and Sue's favourite game on Sue's computer. Mark was a bit disappointed when Mark's father arrived to take Mark home.

Solutions to Activity two: nouns and noun groups

1. The [✓] (first) Tuesday of (each) term is (our house meeting) time.
2. (Greasy, untidy grey) hair fell down from under the [✓] (old man's dirty baseball) cap.
3. We drank (ten) litres of (fizzy green soft) drink at (Jason's tenth birthday) party.
4. [✓] A bunch of (red) roses arrived from an [✓] (enthusiastic) fan.
5. For the [✓] (day's big) adventure we packed a [✓] (picnic) lunch and (our new swimming) costumes.
6. Mum made a [✓] (healthy) soup using (fresh, tasty) vegetables.

Solutions to Activity three: pronoun errors

1. The stairs looked as if **they** would collapse but I walked up **them** anyway.
(**Inconsistent pronoun use** – consistently use plural pronouns, *they* and *them*, for plural noun, *stairs*)
2. For a whale's diet **it** would eat krill, crustaceans and fish.
(**Incorrect pronoun number** – use singular pronoun for singular noun, *a whale*)
3. After they said goodbye to their parents **they** left **them** to go on **their** holiday.
(**Repetitive and ambiguous pronoun use** – It is not clear who *they* are. Who left? Parents or children? And whose holiday?)
4. The book is about a girl **whose** father is an artist. (**Incorrect pronoun used**)
5. The boy put on **his** jacket and picked up **his** suitcase.
(**Incorrect possessive pronoun** – *he* owns the jacket but it is *his* not *he's* and **incorrect gender**, *his* not *her*)
6. After school, Sue brought Mark to **her** house. **They** played **their** favourite game on **her** computer. Mark was a bit disappointed when **his** father arrived to take **him** home.
(**Repetition of nouns** – suggests lack of control of pronouns)

Verbs, verb groups, tense, adverbs and adverbial phrases

Verbs are the dynamic element in clauses and sentences and indicate that something is happening. They can depict **actions** (*run, jump, sink, swim*), internal or **thinking** activities (*think, want, remember, decide*) and ways of communicating or **saying** (*speak, sing, shout, argue*). Other groups of verbs express **feeling** (*hate, love, wonder, fear*) or **relating** (*be, have, appear, become, involve, seem*).

Finite and non-finite verbs and infinitives

The main clause of a sentence needs a verb to locate its events in time. A **finite verb** has a subject and locates an event in time. For example:

The boy ^{finite verb} stumbled.

In the above sentence, the finite verb *stumbled* has a subject (*The boy*) and it is located in time (past tense). Similarly, in the complex sentence below, both verbs (*felt, set*) are finite, as both have a subject (*he, Daniel*) and locate events in the past tense.

Because he ^{finite verb} felt confident, Daniel ^{finite verb} set off.

In contrast, **non-finite verbs** do not have a subject and do not locate an event in time. They indicate an incomplete happening. For example:

^{non-finite verb} Feeling confident, Daniel ^{finite verb} set off.

Successful main clauses (eg *Daniel set off*) always have a finite verb. The form of the verb that uses 'to ...' (eg *to feel*) is called the **infinitive**.

^{non-finite verb group/dependent clause} Beginning to feel confident, Daniel ^{finite verb} set off.

Non-finite verbs usually occur in dependent clauses, not in main clauses by themselves. In main clauses they may be part of a complex verb group. For example:

Justine ^{complex verb group} expected to graduate with honours.

Here the finite verb (past tense) in the main clause, *expected*, is part of a complex verb group that also contains the infinitive *to graduate*.

Non-finite verbs do not have a specific subject, nor do they carry the sentence tense. Non-finite verbs include:

- *-ing* and *-ed* participles (*Hoping for recognition...; Honoured by the award...*)
- infinitives (*To leave with so many prizes was more than Justine had anticipated*).

Simple verbs

There are two types of simple verbs: regular and irregular.

Regular verbs share the same form when they deal with the same tense. For instance, most regular verbs take the ending *-ed* to form the simple past tense eg *cried, played*.

Consider the different forms of the regular verb *to talk*.

- base form: **talk** is used in the present tense for first person **I talk**, second person **you talk** and third person plural **they talk**.
- **-s** form: **talks** is used in the third person singular present tense **s/he talks**.
- **-ing** form: **talking** is the participle used for the present and past continuous tenses
s/he is talking, they are talking, I was talking, you were talking.
- **-ed** form: **talked** is used for the past tense **s/he talked, you talked, we talked**.

Irregular verbs are those which usually form the past tense by changing the inside vowel/s. For example: **drink/drank, dig/dug, run/ran, stand/stood, go/went, feel/felt, keep/kept, lend/lent**.

The past participle can also vary. However, irregular verbs usually have **-s** and **-ing** forms that are regular.

Consider, for example, the varying forms of the irregular verb *to swim*:

Simple present tense: *swim, swims (S/he swims. They swim.)*

Present/past continuous participle: *swimming (I am swimming. They were swimming.)*

Simple past tense: *swam (They swam across the river.)*

Past participle: *swum (They have swum across the river.)*

A writer's ability to form the past tense and past participles of irregular verbs correctly is assessed in the ELLA and BST Writing criterion for Verb Form.

Other irregular verbs that have specialised forms are the verbs *to be* (*am, is, are, was, were*) and *to have* (*has, have, had*).

Verb groups

Verb groups in sentences represent the processes of **doing, saying and thinking**, and **the states of being and having**. A verb group comprises a group of words. Complex verb groups are sometimes called **multiword verbs** because the verb group is made up of several words that may indicate complexities of tense. Sometimes more than one word is needed to express the nuances of meaning of the verb (eg **tried to establish, must have been thinking**). Such words may include auxiliaries and non-finite elements such as participles. It is important that markers accurately discern the boundaries of the verb groups.

Elements of verb groups include:

- finite element (auxiliary verb)
- non-finite elements (present and past participles)
- infinitive verb forms
- adverbs.

Auxiliary verbs

Auxiliary verbs are added to participles to complete verbs. There are two categories of auxiliary verbs:

- primary auxiliaries (forms of the verbs *to be*, *to have*, *to do* and *to get*)
- modal auxiliaries (such as *may*, *can*, *will*, *shall*, *must*, *ought to*, *need to*, *dare to*).

For example, the auxiliary *has* is needed to make the tense in the following sentence correct and complete: *Tan has done his homework.*

The addition of the modal auxiliary *must* enhances the sense of obligation in this sentence:

Maya must complete her assignment by Friday.

Modal auxiliary verbs

Modal auxiliaries (such as *may*, *might*, *must*, *should*) have a similar function to other auxiliary verbs. A verb group can identify the probability and/or degree of obligation of an action through the use of modal auxiliaries, as in the following example:

modal auxiliary auxiliary adverb participle
Chris might have mistakenly given the impression that he did not want to exercise.

In this sentence, the verb group *might have mistakenly given* expresses some past probability that Chris liked exercise. (Note that modal auxiliaries are placed before auxiliary verbs.)

Modality is discussed in more detail on page 41.

Tense

Tense refers to the capacity of verbs to express time, such as **the present**, **the past**, **the continuous past** and **the future**. In English there are two ways of changing the forms of verbs to express different tenses. Participles (*-ing* and *-ed*) can be added to the base form of the verb and auxiliaries (such as forms of the verbs *to be*, *to have* and *to do*) can be added to verbs to express tense.

For example, consider the verb *to jump*:

Present tense *I jump. I do jump. I am jumping.*

Past tense *I jumped. I did jump. I was jumping. I have jumped. I had jumped.*

Future tense *I shall jump. I will jump. I will be jumping.*

Here we see the use of auxiliaries such as *do*, *am*, *did*, *was*, *had*, *have*, *shall* and *will* to form specific tenses, as well as the participles *-ing* and *-ed* being used for different forms of the present, past and future tenses.

Tenses

COMPOUND TENSES
(using auxiliary and participle)

	PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE	
Simple	I lived	I live	I will live	Regular verb (change – (e)d suffix)
	They sneezed	They sneeze	They will sneeze	Plural regular verb
	He swam	He swims	He will swim	Irregular verb (change vowel)
Progressive/continuous (creates a span of time in which the situation is in progress – a limited period that is not necessarily complete)	I was living	I am living	I will be living	
	They were sneezing	They are sneezing	They will be sneezing	
	He was swimming	He is swimming	He will be swimming	
Perfect (marks a completed moment in time)	I had lived	I have lived	I will have lived	
	They had sneezed	They have sneezed	They will have sneezed	
	He had swam (past in the past)	He has swum (past with current relevance)	He will have swum	
Perfect Progressive/continuous (an indefinite or temporary time period that relates to or leads up to the present)	I had been living	I have been living	I will have been living	
	They had been sneezing	They have been sneezing	They will have been sneezing	
	He had been swimming	He has been swimming	He will have been swimming	

Tense in verb groups

The first element of a verb group is called the **finite element** because it is used to mark tense. In addition to basic tenses, the use of participles and auxiliary verbs adds different aspects of meaning within finite verbs so that the reader understands whether the action is complete, still continuing or to be continued in the future. For example:

*The children **swam**.* (simple past tense)

*The children **were** swimming.* (past progressive continuous tense)

*The children **had** swum.* (past perfect tense)

*The children **will be** swimming.* (future progressive tense)

Adverbs and adverbial phrases

Adverbials are optional elements in sentences. They can be one word (an adverb) or a group of words that locate the time, place or manner in which the action (the verb) is performed. Adverbials can be identified by asking ‘How, when, where or in what way or to what degree does the action happen?’ A sentence can have any number of adverbials and their position is not fixed.

adverbial phrase subject adverb verb adverb adverbial phrase adverbial phrase
On Sundays, Kim often walks quickly around the oval for an hour.

adverb adverbial phrase adverbial phrase subject verb adverb adverbial phrase
Often, for an hour on Sundays, Kim walks quickly around the oval.

Adverbs often end in *-ly*. When adverbs modify verbs, they are included in verb groups. For example:

finite auxiliary adverb past participle
*The School Council **has quickly given** its approval.*

In this sentence, *has quickly given* is a verb group that locates the act of giving in time (past tense) and specifies manner (*quickly*). The finite element here is the auxiliary verb *has*.

Adverbs can also modify the meaning of adjectives or other adverbs. For example:

*Chris wasn't **particularly** enthusiastic about going bushwalking.*

Here the adverb *particularly* modifies the adjective *enthusiastic*, indicating degree.

*Lee was **very quickly** running out of patience.*

Here, the adverb *very* modifies the adverb *quickly*, indicating degree.

Consistency in verb tense

In general terms, the use of tense needs to be consistent in a text. This does not mean that all verbs must be in the same tense because skilled writers often make shifts in tense to create effect. In some types of writing, movements in tense are appropriate and intentional.

Literary texts may sometimes seem to have inconsistencies in tense, but this is not always the case. In assessing the criterion of tense in ELLA and BST Writing, it needs to be decided whether or not internal tense shifts are deliberate and/or appropriate to the student's written response.

Subject–verb agreement

Student writers may have difficulty making sure the verb agrees with the number of its subject. That is, a singular subject requires a singular verb and a plural subject requires a plural verb.

singular subject singular verb
Correct: ***My new cat** often **plays** in the backyard.*

singular subject plural verb
Incorrect: ***The horse** **gallop** past me.*

Errors in subject–verb agreement sometimes occur when a qualifying phrase in the plural follows a singular subject. For example:

Incorrect: The main ^{subject} concerns of the fire chief ^{verb} is containing the fire, assessing the damage and determining the cause of the fire.

Correct: The main ^{subject} concerns of the fire chief ^{verb} are containing the fire, assessing the damage and determining the cause of the fire.

Incorrect: The main ^{subject} concern of the investigators ^{verb} are to rescue the workers.

When a subject is part of a noun group and is separated from its verb by an intervening phrase or embedded clause, the verb must agree with the subject word of the noun group. For example:

Correct: A *tour on one of our boats* **is leaving** soon.

Incorrect: A *variety of colourful fabrics* **were** on display in the shop window.

Correct: A *range of responses* **was given** to the question.

The presence of an adjectival clause can also lead to subject–verb agreement errors because the subject is separated from the verb. For example:

Correct: The *house that looks much older than its neighbours* **is being repainted**.

Incorrect: The *officer, who had become separated from the others,* **were** in a perilous situation.

Uncountable nouns such as *water, furniture* and *packaging* take singular verbs. For example:

Water **is** essential for life.

The furniture **was** new.

The packaging **has** been torn.

In sentences/clauses that begin with the word *there*, the verb must match the number (**singular** or **plural**) of what follows the verb. For example:

Correct: *There* **were** many *witnesses* at the scene.

Incorrect: *There* **was** many *witnesses* at the scene.

Correct: *There* **have** been numerous *reports* about the incident.

Incorrect: *There* **has** been numerous *reports* about the incident.

In sentences containing two independent clauses and where the subject of the verb is ellipsed in the second clause, the verb must agree with the subject of the first clause. For example:

Correct: *People had rushed to the park* and **were** watching the game.

Incorrect: *People had rushed to the park* and **was** watching the game.

When a collective noun functions as a subject, subject–verb agreement depends on the meaning attached to the collective noun in its context. If the collection or group is seen as a whole, then a singular verb is used. For example:

Correct: The *family* **is** an important unit in Australian society.

However, if the group is seen as a collection of individuals, then a plural verb is used. For example,

Correct: The *class* **are** going their separate ways at the end of term.

Activity four: verb groups, finite and non-finite verbs

Underline the verb groups in the sentences below. Place a tick above the finite verbs. Circle the non-finite verbs that stand alone. An example has been done for you.

eg Last night a party [✓] was held at the twins' place (to welcome) their newest neighbours.

1. Those yappy dogs were barking all night keeping us awake.
2. I am going to be rich when I am older.
3. By training every day, Jamie won a place on the school team.
4. He went to the car, opened the door and got in.
5. To achieve his goal he will have to try very hard.
6. Excited about the holidays, we raced to the end of the street.

Activity five: verb errors

The sentences below contain the types of verb errors commonly found in student writing. Circle the error and indicate whether it is related to agreement, verb form or tense.

1. The chef were making many delicious sandwiches.
2. Last Tuesday's party is a disaster. One of the guests had fallen in the pool. Luckily someone gets them out again.
3. There was three lions in the distance.
4. Her entire collection of paintings were sold on the weekend.
5. Rob visited his grandmother and then he goes to pick up his brother.
6. Cinderella was surprised when the clock striked twelve.
7. They catched an enormous fish.

Solutions to Activity four: verb groups, finite and non-finite verbs

1. Those yappy dogs were barking all night keeping us awake.
2. I am going to be rich when I am older.
3. By training every day, Jamie won a place on the school team.
4. He went to the car, opened the door and got in.
5. To achieve his goal he will have to try very hard.
6. Excited about the holidays, we raced to the end of the street.

Solutions to Activity five: verb errors

1. The chef **was** making many delicious sandwiches.
(**Agreement** – use a singular verb *was* with a singular subject *The chef*)
2. Last Tuesday's party **was** a disaster. One of the guests **fell** in the pool. Luckily someone **got** them out again.
(**Tense** – use simple past tense throughout)
3. There **were** three lions in the distance.
(**Agreement** – should use a plural verb, *were*, with a plural subject, *three lions*)
4. Her entire collection of paintings **was** sold on the weekend.
(**Agreement** – should use a singular verb, *was*, with the singular collective noun, *collection*)
5. Rob **visited** his grandmother and then he **went** to pick up his brother.
OR
Rob **visits** his grandmother and then he **goes** to pick up his brother.
(**Tense** – need to maintain consistent tense)
6. Cinderella was surprised when the clock **struck** twelve.
(**Verb form** – incorrect past tense of irregular verb)
7. They **caught** an enormous fish.
(**Verb form** – incorrect past tense of irregular verb)

Clauses and phrases

Clauses

A clause is the basic unit of meaning in English. A clause is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb and can stand alone as a unit of information.

In general, there are two types of clauses:

- A **main or independent clause** that must have a finite verb.
- A **dependent clause** that comprises a unit of information, but which depends on its relationship with the main clause for it to make complete sense. A dependent clause may have a finite or non-finite verb. For example:

Finite dependent clause: *I left the field before the gates were closed.*

Non-finite dependent clause: *Realising my mistake, I burst into tears.*

Verbless clauses

Some clauses provide an additional unit of information to a sentence, seemingly without a verb. Such clauses are called **verbless clauses**. Their use usually demonstrates a writer's superior writing skills, extensive vocabulary and control of language. Instead of simple verbs being used, key information about the processes in the clause is nominalised or transformed into nouns. (Nominalisation is discussed in more detail on page 44.)

For example:

Trying to escape, I used my fist to break the glass. (Dependent clause using non-finite verb)

In a desperate attempt for freedom, I used my fist to break the glass. (Verbless clause with two nominalisations)

In some verbless clauses, the verb is understood or ellipsed.

For example:

***Isolated and alone**, I knew that I must be strong.* (Verb is understood.)

*I knew that I would soon find a way out, **despite the rapidly rising water level and the tightly sealed doors**.* (Verbs have become adjectives.)

*The workers, **whether young or old**, scrambled quickly to safety.* (Verb is ellipsed.)

***The completion of the evaporation process over time** allowed crystals to form.* (Two nominalisations: *completion* and *evaporation*.)

***Despite high costs**, the company still made a profit.* (Verb is understood.)

Phrases

A phrase or word group is a grammatical unit that does not have the structure of a clause or sentence and cannot be analysed in terms of subject, verb and object. A phrase is a group of words that forms part of a clause and gives information about the circumstances of the process or thing that it is adding meaning to.

In general, there are five types of phrases or word groups:

- noun groups
- verb groups
- prepositional phrases
- adjectival phrases
- adverbial phrases.

A prepositional phrase begins with a preposition and is followed by a noun group. Students use prepositional phrases to build up description. Prepositional phrases can be adjectival (doing the job of an adjective) or adverbial (doing the job of an adverb). Examples of prepositional phrases are:

in the morning (time)

by the side of the road (place)

with great enthusiasm (manner)

Prepositional phrases are readily identifiable because they begin with a preposition. They locate nouns, pronouns and noun groups in time, space or manner/circumstance.

Common prepositions include:

at, on, before, in, from, since, for, during, to, until, after, like, by, into, onto, off, out, above, over, under, below, across, after, around, beside, between, down, past, near, through, without, of, unlike, despite

An adjectival phrase is a group of words that functions as an adjective. Adjectival phrases can be located before or after the noun that they modify or they can function as the complement of a clause. For example:

Premodification: *The extremely large caterpillar ate the leaf.*

Postmodification: *The caterpillar of large proportions ate the leaf.*

Complement: *The caterpillar was extremely large.*

An adverbial phrase is a group of words that functions as an adverb. For example:

Peter completed the task very skillfully without delay.

Georgina walked across the park quite casually.

Particular prepositions are used with certain nouns, verbs and adjectives. Note the accepted combinations of the following words:

similar to, by chance, on foot, account for, consist of, inconsistent with, rely on, long for, different from/to, compared to/with, contrast to, equal to

How are sentences structured?

In ELLA and BST Writing the criteria which assess sentence structure consider whether students demonstrate correctly structured sentences and whether students use a variety of types of sentence structures.

A **sentence** is a group of words that makes complete sense. In writing it is marked at its beginning with a capital letter and at its ending with a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark.

Sentences serve the following purposes:

- To make **statements** (declaratives): *The girl played basketball.*
- To ask **questions** (interrogatives): *When does the game begin?*
- To utter **commands** (imperatives): *Aim the ball higher.*
- To deliver **exclamations** (exclamatives): *What a goal!*

Simple, compound and complex sentences

Sentences are categorised into three types – simple, compound and complex – according to the number and types of clauses they contain.

Simple sentences

A simple sentence consists of a single independent or main clause. It does not have another clause functioning as one of its elements. A simple sentence may also include one or more phrases.

For example:

main clause prepositional phrase
Kim walked along the track.

adverbial phrase main clause
At exactly 9 pm every night, David turned off the lights.

Compound sentences

In compound sentences, there are two or more independent clauses that are linked. Each independent or main clause is able to stand on its own and the meanings of all clauses are of equal importance.

Because compound sentences coordinate independent clauses equally, they tend to use the additive conjunctions *and* and *or*, or the contrastive conjunction *but*.

For example:

*John was getting tired **but** he was determined to finish his bushwalk.*

*John ate his lunch **and** then he continued on his way.*

Complex sentences

In assessing student responses in ELLA and BST Writing, both the number and variety of complex sentence structures demonstrated in the writing are considered.

A complex sentence consists of one (or more) main clause/s and one (or more) dependent clause/s.

A dependent clause provides a separate piece of information to the main clause but is dependent on the main clause to make meaning or sense. For example, consider the dependent clauses in bold type below. Neither could stand on its own. Each depends on ideas in the main clause for its meaning.

*I sat down on a cardboard box **that promptly collapsed under my weight.***

***For as long as she could remember,** Olivia had enjoyed playing piano.*

Complex sentences can have dependent clauses in a range of logical relationships with the main clause. Conjunctions such as *when, because, although* and *if* indicate the nature of the relationship between some dependent clauses and the main clause.

Complex sentences can include both complex and compound elements. Consider the example below.

first main clause second main clause dependent clause
*Jill opened the map **and** studied it carefully **so that she knew exactly where to go.***

The coordinating conjunction **and** links the compound elements of this sentence, while the subordinating conjunction **so that** links the complex element.

Adverbial clauses

Adverbial clauses provide further information about the time, place and manner in which the verb (the action) occurs. Adverbial clauses usually begin with a conjunction that indicates their relationship with the main clause.

Different types of subordinating conjunctions include:

- Place: *where, wherever*
- Time: *after, before, when, just as, while, as long as, since, until, every time*
- Manner: *as, by, through, with, as if, as though, like*
- Causal: *because, since, as, therefore, consequently, yet, as a result of, so as*
- Conditional: *although, unless, if, otherwise, still, despite*
- Concessional: *although, though, even though, even if*
- Comparative: *as, as if, as though, so ... that, on the other hand*
- Sequential: *firstly (secondly, thirdly etc), finally, then, when, next, here, now, lastly, meanwhile*

Adjectival clauses

Adjectival clauses (sometimes called relative clauses) qualify or add meaning to nouns or nominal groups in the main clause. Relative clauses are usually introduced by relative pronouns such as *who*, *which*, *that*, *whose*, *whom*.

*Katya, **who** had never enjoyed the outdoors, was forced to go for a bushwalk.*

*I read the book Mr Wilson gave me. (**which/that** has been ellipsed)*

Non-finite dependent clauses

Dependent clauses do not need to have finite verbs (verbs with a subject and tense). Non-finite clauses contain the non-finite form of the verb: the infinitive ‘to ...’ (*to start, to forget, to play*) or the participle forms which end in *-ing* or *-ed*.

Non-finite clauses may function as adjectival or adverbial clauses in a sentence. However, in assessing student responses in ELLA and BST Writing, non-finite clauses are considered separately from other clause types because they show that the student can demonstrate a different kind of complex structure.

Multiple dependent clauses

In ELLA and BST Writing the levels of complexity within sentences are also considered closely. Students with a more confident grasp of complex structures may demonstrate sentences which contain multiple dependent clauses. For instance, in a dependent clause there may be another dependent clause. For example:

Katya, who had never enjoyed the outdoors because she hated snakes, was forced to go for a bushwalk.

The underlined dependent adverbial clause adds meaning, not to the main clause, but to the dependent adjectival clause (*who ...*), giving the reason for Katya’s dislike of the outdoors.

An analysis of the following complex sentence reveals its four components and their interdependence on each other for meaning. Verbs are underlined; conjunctions are in **bold** type.

***Although** it was squashed **as if** someone had sat on it, Melanie ate her lunch enthusiastically, **because** she was very hungry.*

1. *Although it was squashed* – dependent adverbial clause in the first position adding information to the clause that follows
2. *as if someone had sat on it* – dependent adverbial clause adding information to the previous dependent clause
3. *Melanie ate her lunch enthusiastically* – main clause
4. *because she was very hungry* – dependent adverbial clause adding information to the main clause

Dependent clauses in first position

Sometimes a writer places a dependent clause before the main clause in order to emphasise this part of the sentence. In assessing student responses in ELLA and BST Writing, this type of complex structure is considered separately as it demonstrates a more sophisticated control of writing.

Dependent clauses in first position are usually adverbial clauses or non-finite clauses.

Before I knew it, it was lunchtime. (dependent adverbial clause in first position)

To get to the beach, I have to catch three buses. (dependent non-finite clause in first position)

Knowing how badly she needed it, I gave her some water. (dependent non-finite clause in first position)

Common sentence structure errors

When assessing sentence structure in ELLA and BST Writing, it is necessary to follow the student's punctuation indicating sentence boundaries. A sentence is judged to be incorrect for the following reasons:

No main clause

Which I didn't recognise.

When I entered the classroom.

A problem in one of its clauses

No subject

Often walks past the factory.

Shows she was serious.

No verb

A petrol can and lighter in the bushes.

No finite verb

The trees swaying in the breeze.

No correct punctuation marker or conjunction between clauses

I made some new friends, one girl's name was Alex.

I like our new home it is close to the beach.

Run-on sentences

Run-on sentences are poorly constructed sentences in which writers are unable to link their ideas correctly within the sentence boundaries they have indicated. Features of run-on sentences include:

- multiple clauses inappropriately linked by commas
- multiple compound clauses repetitiously linked by coordinating conjunctions
- a variety of clauses and conjunctions that forms a sentence that is too long and loses focus.

Lucy was tired so she sat down and she had a drink and she ate a sandwich but then she decided to have a rest and she went to sleep then suddenly she woke up.

Everyone was upset because the park had been flooded and people came from everywhere to watch the water level rising, so the street was very crowded, and the emergency crew took a while to arrive, then they started to clear the people away and tried to stop the flooding.

Activity eight: correct and incorrect sentences

Identify whether or not the following sentences are correctly structured. Explain what is wrong with the incorrectly structured sentences.

1. Go away!
2. As the doors swung open.
3. She had been walking for half an hour, she was starting to feel hungry.
4. I rushed towards the door only to find it locked.
5. Because I didn't know any better, I opened the envelope.

Activity nine: sentence types

Underline the main clause in each of the following sentences. Identify the type/s of dependent clause/s it may contain. Identify whether the sentence is simple, compound or complex in structure. Two examples have been done for you.

eg (prepositional phrase) *Inside the box,* main clause *the most amazing sight met my eyes.* **simple sentence**

eg dependent adverbial clause in first position *If he released another CD /* main clause *he would have many more fans.* **complex sentence**

1. I heard unusual sounds coming from the backyard.
2. That is the place where we met our friends.
3. When she got there the cupboard was bare.
4. Bring a pencil, an eraser, a ruler and a calculator that works.
5. It had been there all that time, covered in dust.
6. Her latest film is disappointing in its meandering plot and poor script.
7. Rushing through the forest I tripped over a log which was lying in my path.
8. The mixture is kneaded and then left overnight.
9. He climbed the mountain to be the first one at the summit.
10. A blanket made of wool is very warm.

Solutions to Activity eight: correct and incorrect sentences

1. Go away!	correct sentence (subject, <i>you</i> , is implied)
2. As the doors swung open.	incorrect sentence (no main clause)
3. She had been walking for half an hour, she was starting to feel hungry.	incorrect sentence (It is a run-on sentence with two main clauses. It needs a conjunction or different punctuation)
4. I rushed towards the door only to find it locked.	correct sentence
5. Because I didn't know any better, I opened the envelope.	correct sentence

Solutions to Activity nine: sentence types

<p>main clause non-finite dependent clause</p> <p>1. <u>I heard unusual sounds</u> / coming from the backyard.</p>	complex sentence
<p>main clause dependent adjectival clause</p> <p>2. <u>That is the place</u> / where we met our friends.</p>	complex sentence
<p>dependent adverbial clause in first position main clause</p> <p>3. When she got there / <u>the cupboard was bare</u>.</p>	complex sentence
<p>main clause dependent adjectival clause</p> <p>4. <u>Bring a pencil, an eraser, a ruler and a calculator</u> / that works.</p>	complex sentence
<p>main clause dependent non-finite clause</p> <p>5. <u>It had been there</u> all that time, / covered in dust.</p>	complex sentence
<p>main clause (adverbial phrase)</p> <p>6. <u>Her latest film is disappointing</u> in its meandering plot and poor script.</p>	simple sentence
<p>non-finite dependent clause in first position main clause</p> <p>7. Rushing through the forest / <u>I tripped over a log</u> / dependent adjectival clause which was lying in my path.</p>	complex sentence (multiple dependent clauses)
<p>main clause conjunctions main clause (subject & finite verb ellipsed)</p> <p>8. <u>The mixture is kneaded</u> / and then left overnight.</p>	compound sentence
<p>main clause dependent non-finite clause</p> <p>9. <u>He climbed the mountain</u> / to be the first one at the summit.</p>	complex sentence
<p>main clause dependent non-finite adjectival clause main clause</p> <p>10. <u>A blanket</u> / made of wool / is very warm.</p>	complex sentence

How are whole texts structured?

Whole text organisation

To compose an effective text, writers need to be able to organise the whole text in a systematic and logical manner to ensure that the message is clear and complete. As well as organising ideas at sentence level, writers need to organise the text as a whole and this involves planning what they are going to say and then organising their ideas into logical, well-developed paragraphs.

The overall construction of the text must conform to the structural conventions of the text type. For example, if the text type is an exposition (persuasion), its basic structure needs to be:

- statement of position and preview of argument
- stages in the argument
- summing up of position.

A text of this type would probably consist of at least four paragraphs.

Paragraphs

A paragraph is an organised part of a whole piece of writing. It begins with a topic sentence that introduces what is to be discussed in the rest of the paragraph. A paragraph is usually more than one sentence long, yet it can be short and effective as in this introduction to a persuasive text:

The dumping of unwanted cats in the bushland near Sydney is a hazard for native fauna and flora. People need to be aware of the consequences of dumping cats and take a more responsible attitude. The future of wildlife is at stake.

The text now needs to develop the arguments to support this position. Each paragraph must focus on one aspect of the argument. If it fails to do this, and introduces ideas that are inconsistent with what is introduced in the topic sentence, the paragraph can be seen as unsuccessful. For example:

*Dumped cats turn into feral cats and kill rats and mice as well as small native animals. These animals have not learned how to keep themselves safe from these new predators so they easily get killed. **People should remember that and give unwanted pets to the pet shop to sell. The pet shop in Cronulla pays good money for kittens. That way you could make some money out of unwanted cats.***

Here the writing loses focus and introduces ideas that are not relevant to the topic sentence.

A successful paragraph introduces its topic and proceeds to explore it logically and with some development. For example:

***Feral cats do damage to native plants too.** When they kill native fauna, the balance of nature is affected. Birds and possums help to spread seeds and so new plants grow. Birds also help to pollinate some plants. When feral cats kill all the wildlife, seeds aren't spread around and plants don't get pollinated so native plants die out.*

Here the topic sentence *Feral cats do damage to native plants too* is developed logically with examples of the damage and the consequences.

In literary texts paragraphs indicate the introduction of new circumstances or characters into the writing. Writers divide their writing into sections which deal with one action or scene. Paragraphs show the introduction of:

- a change of ideas or character focus
- a shift in the action
- a movement in time or setting
- a change of speakers in conversation.

Paragraph indicators

Paragraphs can be indicated by indentation or line breaks. In first draft writing, such as ELLA and BST Writing, students may indicate paragraphs by square brackets.

Some writers indicate paragraphs in a random fashion, so care needs to be taken to ensure that ideas within the paragraphs are organised logically and appropriately.

Activity ten: paragraphs

Read the narrative passage below. Discuss where the scenes or actions change. Use square brackets to indicate where new paragraphs could begin.

The storm blew up quickly and rain drummed down onto the tin roof of our shack. The grey clouds swirled low in the sky and gusty winds drove the sea angrily against the rock ledge beneath us. By nightfall, the storm had worsened. The gale-force winds threatened to tear our humble hut from its foundations. The doors and windows shuddered and the air was filled with the sound of the constant pounding of the waves. Patrick tried in vain to start a fire in the grate but the air, forcing down the chimney, kept blowing out his kindling. He knew if he gave up, it was going to be a long, cold night for everyone. Suddenly, the whole room was hit with a shaft of bright light and we all steeled ourselves for the thunderous crack we knew would follow.

Solution to Activity ten: paragraphs

The storm blew up quickly ...

[*By nightfall, the storm had worsened ...* **movement in time**

[*Patrick tried in vain ...* **change in character focus**

[*Suddenly, the whole room was hit ...* **shift in the action**

Activity eleven: mixed errors

Some errors commonly found in student writing are listed below.

- a. Error in clause pattern
- b. Error in pronoun use
- c. Error in agreement
- d. Error in tense
- e. Error in sentence structure

Choose one or more of a, b, c, d, e to identify what is wrong with each of the following sentences.

1. These days a higher proportion of jobs involve computer literacy.
2. There's a hidden door in here I'm banging on different parts of the wall to find it.
3. Eventually the tadpole's tail disappears and is now ready to leave the pond.
4. I always goes there with my aunty.
5. The room was quite long with one chair up one end and another chair up the other end with a monster sitting on the chair.
6. The door was very thick but the creature look strong enough to break it down.
7. It is already morning and only the youngest of the brothers were still asleep.
8. There's just too many cars on the road outside our school.
9. When I was doing what I normally do, collecting rubbish on the beach. I looked up.
10. The zoo was very interesting with zebras, elephants and all sorts of animals in them.

Solutions to Activity eleven: mixed errors

1. c
2. e
3. a
4. c
5. b
6. d
7. c, d
8. c
9. e
10. b

Other relevant concepts

Stylistic devices

Imagery

Imagery refers to descriptive techniques used by writers to create images or pictures in readers' minds.

Figurative language

Simile: a comparison between one thing and another, using *like* or *as ... as* to connect the ideas. For example:

The storm clouds looked like huge icebergs.

The sea was as smooth as glass.

Literal comparisons: the comparison of one thing to another in literal terms is not a simile but is still an effective descriptive device.

The boys were more agile than monkeys.

Her eyes were bluer than sapphires.

The bloodstains were redder than Burgundy wine.

Metaphor: a comparison between two things when one is said to be the other.

The trees were a sea of green tossing outside her window.

September is fragrant flowers and butterflies.

Cotton wool clouds floated across the sky.

Personification: the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects. It is a form of metaphor.

The flames licked greedily at the walls.

The ship creaked and groaned in pain as the rocks savagely attacked its hull.

Other literary devices

Alliteration: the repetition of consonant sounds in groups of words to achieve effect and emphasise meaning.

The wind whistled wildly through the trees.

What a sad and sorry sight you are!

Assonance: the repetition of vowel sounds in groups of words to achieve effect and emphasise meaning.

He stayed and played all day.

Oh where, oh where is the hairy bear?

Onomatopoeia: words that sound like the action they represent.

*He heard the **hiss** and **sizzle** of sausages cooking.*

*The **buzzing** flies and the **whirring** fans reminded us that it was summer.*

Pun: a witty play on words, the word being used having two different senses.

*Have a **whale** of a time on Willy's Whale Watching Tours!*

Repetition: when key words and phrases are repeated for emphasis and effect.

*The walls **shuddered**, the doors **shuddered**, even the floor **shuddered**.*

Voice

In grammar, voice refers to the relationship of the subject of a clause to the verb. In other words, is the subject active or passive in the process indicated by the verb? Is the subject the doer of the action or is the action done to him/her/it?

In assessing student writing in ELLA and BST it is useful to understand how changes in voice affect the subject/verb/object pattern in student responses.

Active voice

In grammar, the person or thing making the process of the verb happen is known as the agent. When the subject is also the agent of the verb, then the sentence is said to be in active voice.

For example:

subject	verb	object
<i>Martin</i>	<i>ate</i>	<i>the sandwich.</i>

Passive voice

When the receiver of the action (the noun affected by the verb) is in the subject position, the sentence is said to be in the passive voice. In other words, the action is done to the subject.

subject	verb group	object
<i>The sandwich</i>	<i>was eaten by</i>	<i>Martin.</i>

As seen in the example, movement from active to passive voice usually affects the form of the verb and the structure of the sentence. In the example, the active form *ate* of the verb 'to eat' is changed to the passive form *was eaten*. The preposition *by* is inserted before the object or agent *Martin* indicating that he is the one who did the action.

Agentless passive

The examples so far have all involved an agent. However, some passive constructions, called 'agentless passive', omit the agent altogether.

In the following sentences, the agent has been omitted, possibly to conceal the identity of the 'doer', to make a generalisation or because the agent is not known.

The bush track had been damaged.

The camera was found under some trees.

It is widely believed that too much time spent playing computer games is bad for children.

Passives and agentless passives are more common in writing that argues or persuades than they are in narrative and literary texts. Passive constructions can be effective and appropriate in some text types, but they should not be overused, as they take focus away from the action. Overuse can make writing stilted and vague.

Narrative voice

Voice has another meaning in writing, apart from its grammatical meaning. Narrative voice refers to the point of view from which a story is written. Points of view can be:

- First person (*I, we*), where narrators create texts in their own voice, giving a personal perspective eg autobiographical texts. Sometimes writers assume the role of a character and speak in their voice, in the first person.
- Second person (*you*), where narrators directly address the person being spoken to.
- Third person (*he/she/they*), where an impersonal or objective perspective is taken, such as in factual texts, or in fiction where writers create events and characters, observing them from outside.

Personal and impersonal address

Address refers to the manner in which creators of texts address responders. For example, does the writer speak directly and personally to the reader, as the writer of a personal letter does? Or is an impersonal third person voice adopted, such as in a newspaper report?

Factual texts such as reports, technical descriptions, explanations and essays do not usually use first or second person. The use of second person address in these types of texts is often indicative of young or immature writers who favour speech-like constructions in their writing. Writers who have limited control over the requirements of a text type may have lapses in register that involve using second person inappropriately. For instance, a report written in the third person about an athlete's success may end inappropriately with: *Well done, Kathy! We're proud of you.*

However, second person address is appropriate for some text types, such as procedures.

For example: *Feed the kitten three meals a day. Chop the food finely.*

Second person can also be used as a rhetorical device in persuasive texts to engage the reader.

For example: *This computer game will turn you into a world class champ.*

Texts that tend towards the personal, such as letters, commonly use second person address.

For example: *It is really great here. You would simply love it.*

Modality

When writers want to indicate how definite they are about something, they use modality to take a position somewhere between complete agreement and complete disagreement. Modality allows writers to express certainty (high modality) or uncertainty (low modality). Sophisticated writers are able to manipulate modality subtly to make their writing more powerful, especially in persuasion and argument texts.

In general terms, modality of obligation is used more in speech, especially when the aim is to achieve a goal or to manipulate behaviour. The modalities of obligation are in bold type in the following examples.

*Everyone **must definitely** learn how to swim.*

***Surely** you **can't** think that sort of behaviour **will** be tolerated.*

In dialogue, modality is often used to make speech realistic and characters seem authentic.

For example:

Obligation *"You **must** go for a bushwalk," Mum insisted.*

Probability *"You **might** like it **even better** than watching television," she added.*

In writing, modality indicates degree or qualification of a writer's perspective and, as such, modalities of probability are more effective. For example:

*Dan wondered if he **might** be able to avoid his mother's demands. He **could possibly** pretend that he hadn't heard her. She was **definitely** becoming **more** absent-minded lately, so she **probably** wouldn't pursue the matter.*

Modality can be expressed through a range of grammatical forms: modal auxiliaries, tense, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, nouns and clauses.

Some frequently used modalities are:	
Auxiliaries	<i>must, can, will, may, might, should, would, could</i>
Verbs	<i>seem, appear, think, believe, look, sound, consider, have (to), ought (to), need (to)</i>
Adjectives	<i>definite, total, certain, essential, absolute, complete, possible, probable, likely, unlikely, usual, unusual, obvious, sure</i>

Modal auxiliary of probability: *Swimming **can** be good exercise.*

Temporal/modal auxiliary: *Running **will** be good exercise.*

Modal adverb and modal auxiliary: ***Perhaps** we **might** travel next year.*

Modal adjective and modal auxiliary: *It is **probable** that he **will** be late.*

Noun and modal auxiliary: *It is a **possibility** that he **could** be late.*

Modality can also be expressed through verbs. For example:

*It **would seem** that swimming is good exercise.*

*It **appears** that swimming is good exercise.*

Modal verbs that express thoughts, feelings and opinions are effective persuasive devices. Verbs about sensing (eg *seems, appears, looks, sounds*) generally use a dummy subject (eg *it, this*) to give the impression of widely held beliefs. For example:

*It **looks** as if ...*

*It **sounds** like ...*

*It **seems** to be the case that ...*

*This **appears** to be ...*

Modal adverbs

Modal adverbs express the writer's assessment of the truth or certainty of what is being discussed. They are usually placed just before or after the finite verb, or sometimes they appear at the beginning of the proposition.

Here are some modal adverbs and their typical use:

Probability/obligation	<i>certainly, surely, probably, perhaps, maybe, possibly, definitely, positively</i>
Frequency	<i>always, often, usually, regularly, typically, occasionally, seldom, rarely, ever, never, once</i>
Presumption	<i>evidently, apparently, presumably, clearly, no doubt, obviously, of course, personally, honestly</i>
Inclination	<i>willingly, readily, gladly</i>
Time	<i>soon, yet, still, already, once, just</i>
Degree	<i>quite, almost, nearly, totally, entirely, utterly, completely, literally, absolutely, scarcely, hardly, on the whole, provisionally</i>
Intensity	<i>just, simply, ever, even, only, really, actually, seriously</i>

Rhetorical function of modality

Two important functions of writing are:

- **Representational:** the reader is being told something
- **Rhetorical:** the reader is positioned to accept the truth or importance of what is being said.

Writers often use modal adjectives and nouns as effective rhetorical devices in persuasion or argument texts. For example:

*It is **essential** that everyone learns to swim.* (attempting to persuade)

*Learning to swim is an **essential** skill for everyone.* (stating a fact)

Nouns can also have a modal function:

*It is a **necessity** that all children learn to swim.*

Rhetorical devices

Rhetorical devices are used to achieve effect and position the reader, especially in persuasive texts and arguments. Rhetorical devices include:

Rhetorical question: a statement in the form of a question that requires no answer. It is used to engage the reader.

Hasn't every child thought about having a dog as a pet?

Do you really expect Australians to stay indoors when the sun is shining?

With a cast like that who wouldn't enjoy this movie?

Emphatic statement: a rhetorical statement intended to persuade the reader.

As everyone knows, nothing is more important for growing bodies.

Imperative or command: the use of the second person, imperative voice to directly engage the reader. It is an effective persuasive device that demands a response from the reader.

Say, 'No!' to plastic bags now!

Don't be taken in by this!

Emotive language: the choice of words to appeal to the emotions of readers and engage them in the text at an emotional rather than a rational level.

A crazed gunman was on the loose, rampaging wildly through the streets.

Nominalisation

Nominalisation is the process of forming a noun or a noun group from a verb or clause.

Nominalisation of a verb:

Water vapour condenses when the air temperature is reduced.

Condensation results from a reduction in air temperature.

Nominalisation of a clause:

Students like using mobile phones so they spend too much money on them.

The popularity of mobile phones has led to unnecessary expense.

Nominalisations are a feature of particular types of writing such as expositions, essays and technical writing that require the use of abstract ideas and concepts. Arguments often use nominalisations, as they can effectively remove agency and time from statements. In this way nominalisations render propositions more difficult to refute, which makes them an effective tool in persuasive texts and arguments.

Forming nominalisations

Nominalisations can be formed by adding a suffix to a verb. For example:

- *frustrate/frustration* (suffix *-tion*)
- *argue/argument* (suffix *-ment*)
- *propose/proposal* (suffix *-al*).

*She **encouraged** the cast and they **performed** brilliantly.*

*Her **encouragement** of the cast drew out a brilliant **performance**.*

*After the Romans **settled** Britain many roads were built.*

*After Roman **settlement** of Britain many roads were built.*